DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 12' 659 EA 008 567

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TITLE The Citizen/Teacher Curriculum Council: A Curriculum Development Involvement Strategy.
PUB DATE Sep 76
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Citizen Participation; *Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *Models; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; School Community Relationship; *Teacher Participation
IDENTIFIERS *Citizen Teacher Curriculum Council

ABSTRACT

In most school systems today, curriculum development is the work of specialists who function as consultants to classroom teachers, administrators, and school boards. An alternative is the Citizen/Teacher Curriculum Council (C/TCC) approach, which calls for direct involvement of community members and classroom teachers in curriculum development. The C/TCC would function in an advisory capacity to the school district's program specialists, administrators, and school board; in turn, academic specialists and curriculum developers would counsel the C/TCC on technical matters. To ensure a minimum level of qualifications for C/TCC members, the school district should develop appropriate training programs in curriculum development. Because of the differing background and training of council members, separate training programs for professional and lay members of the C/TCC would be advisable. While the C/TCC model emphasizes direct teacher and citizen participation in curriculum development, it is not meant to exclude administrators. Rather, the structure of the C/TCC process should guarantee the interaction of administrators, teachers, community members, and specialist consultants. (Author/JG)

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The Citizen/Teacher Curriculum Council:

A Curriculum Development Involvement Strategy

Richard O. Peters, Ed. D

EA 008 567

September 1976

The curriculum[1] is the keystone of the American education system. In turn, the American educational system is the life-blood of our economic, political and social order - continually pumping new citizens into the mainstream of American life. This educational system is housed in the school - an agency of the community. In short, the curriculum is the basis of a socialization process that has its roots deeply embedded at the local level - within the community.

There is no national curriculum - although the several states have agreed and passed legislation which mandate minimum credit hour standards in subjects such as English, United States History, the sciences, and physical education. In 1976, it still remains a fact that there is a great deal of local autonomy regarding the character and structure of school curricula in America.

There are strong and inseparable ties between the community and the school curriculum. The curriculum is the structure within which; the vehicle by which, students learn and develop. These 'students' are the children of the community - specifically the children of individuals who collectively comprise the community. This fact constitutes a natural reason why community

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[1] Curriculum: a formal and informal design/strategy to affect student learning, physical growth and socialization. This design/strategy consists of the academic and non-academic activities and offerings of a given school or system.

members should be interested in curriculum development as well as a reason why they must be involved directly in the process. Community members do have a vested interest in the schools and their instructional programs - that interest being their children!

The Curriculum Council

What is proposed is a curriculum develop scheme that involves both lay and professional groups. (See Diagram I) This mix of diverse backgrounds, concerns and interests results in a synthesized whole; a new entity that possesses differing levels of expertise. This homogeneous body would function in an advisory capacity to the system administrators, program specialists and the school board(s). THE CITIZEN/TEACHER CURRICULUM COUNCIL (C/TCC) would have a finger on the pulse of broad-based community level concerns and the professional membership would reflect the interests of the system's staff. Academic specialists, curriculum developers and support service personnel - as well as lay advisors - would council the C/TCC on technical matters. The C/TCC would truly reflect the diverse concerns, desires and interests of the total community - not just special interest groups or influential/vocal segments of the total population. The C/TCC would be invested with advisory powers and would function as part of the school system structure. (See Diagram II)

The Process - Present

In most school systems curriculum development involvement is limited to those individuals who have training in the process as well as prior experience. These 'specialists' function as consultants to classroom teachers, administrators and school boards. In many systems these 'specialists' are seen as the only individuals who can and should become directly involved with curriculum development.

In the past few years, their has been isolated instances where teachers have become more directly involved in curriculum development. The rationale for this approach to curriculum development is that the classroom teacher is a valuable resource people - possessing expertise in specific content areas and skills related to program development - as well as program implementation. This point of view holds that the teacher can contribute to curriculum development and student learning in ways other than just direct student-teacher classroom contact time.

More and more, teachers are being encouraged to participate in planning sessions and to have in-put into the curriculum development process. In these instances, classroom teachers and subject matter/curriculum specialists pool their talents and resources in efforts to improve instruction and to make the schooling process more relevant to student interests and needs.

The Process - Future

Curriculum development is a complex, multi-faceted process that demands qualified participants. Too many times the thrust is in the direction of product accomplishment; that is, the development of a curriculum document, and - as a result - little attention is paid to the quality of either the participants or the product. If a system is to achieve a quality product; that is, a relevant instructional program which provides learning experiences and enriches student skills, then attention must be paid to the qualifications and training of those directly involved in the process of program development.

To insure a minimum level of acceptable qualifications there is a need to offer teachers in-service training in curriculum development. A series of in-service workshops can be staffed with curriculum development and academic subject matter specialists and offered to teachers on a staff development credit basis.

The C/TCC approach to curriculum development calls for the direct involvement of community lay members in the curriculum development process. These individuals need preparatory training for their participation in the process. Community members too need to be enrolled in a training - program. It may be advisable to develop a lay member training program separate from the teacher in-service training program. The reason for this separation of staff is due to the fact that

teachers - because of past training and experience - would enter the on-going curriculum development process at a different level of capability than would lay council members who have little - if any - preparation and experience in formalized instruction.

While the objective of the teacher in-service program is to enrich existent skills and to expand their perceptions of new facets of a familiar process (teaching), lay members enter the process at an even more basic level - one of little or no experience and few, if any, skills.

It may be advisable to categorize teacher in-service training programs as being enrichment skillshops[2] while lay member training sessions are structured as workshops[3].

The result of these processes is a better equipped and understanding group of lay and professional people ready to participate in the process of curriculum development.

Enter the Administration

It is vitally important that school system administrators become involved in the curriculum development process. It is at this building and central office level of authority that they system must follow the dictates of both the courts and the

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[2] skillshops: short term closure oriented activities geared toward skills enrichment for professional staff members.

[3] workshops: concentration on 'how-to-do-it' demonstrations and materials introduction for non-professional community members.

state department(s) of education regarding statutes and minimum hours of instruction guidelines.

While the C/TCC model for curriculum development places a greater emphasis on direct teacher and lay group participation in the process that is found in most systems today, this is not to imply or state that the process should be conducted without the involvement of administrators. The C/TCC process states, by the nature of its structure and relationship to the total system organization, that the process of curriculum development must not only encourage the interaction of administrators, teachers, lay people, and specialist consultants but - via its structure guarantee that it will, in fact, happen. (See Diagram III)

The structure of the C/TCC model insures that a wide diversity of special interests is represented in both the decision making and content identification levels of curriculum development. Because of its composition of diverse backgrounds, experiences, interests and skills, the C/TCC model guarantees the continual in-put and interaction of representatives from the total community - of which the school is only one component part. Rather than the community being an appendage of the school, the school is, in its proper perspective, merely a social agency changed by the community to execute prescribed tasks related to the education of youth.

A key to the success of the C/TCC model is that a power structure is established within the school system which not only encourages but allows for face-to-face meetings and the exchange of ideas. The process of curriculum development will be enhanced only when those factions and special interests within the community are recognized and make part of the decision-making/program formulation process. It would be unwise for the educational system to ignore the community's rightful role in the process of curriculum development and to insulate itself from these interests by constructing barriers that discourage or impede involvement. For and to do so only would cause resentment and community based interest group consolidation outside the system. It is more blessed to include than to exclude!

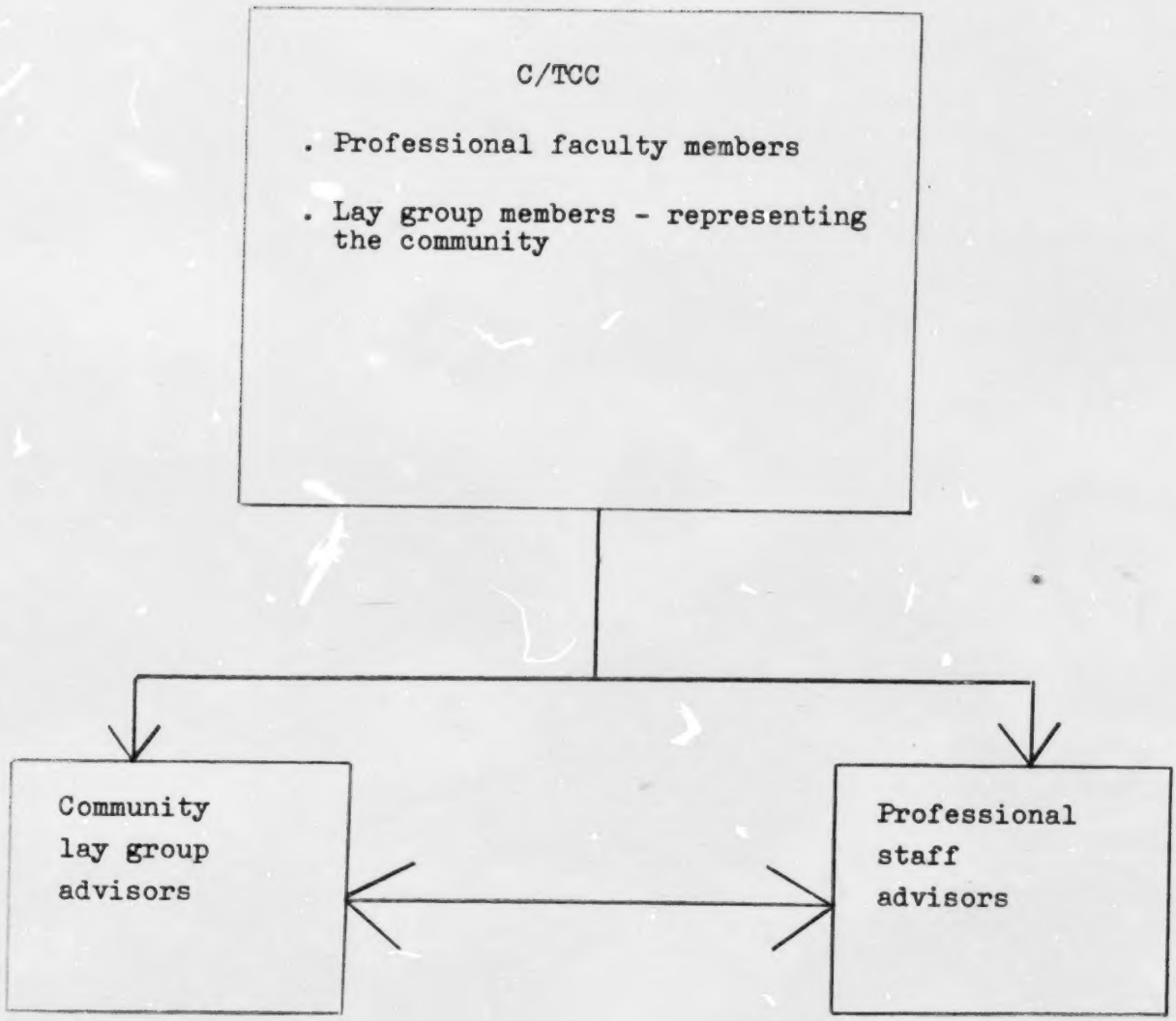
C/TCC
. Professional faculty members
. Lay group members - representing the community
Community lay group advisors
Professional staff advisors

DIAGRAM I: The Citizen/Teacher Curriculum Council Structure

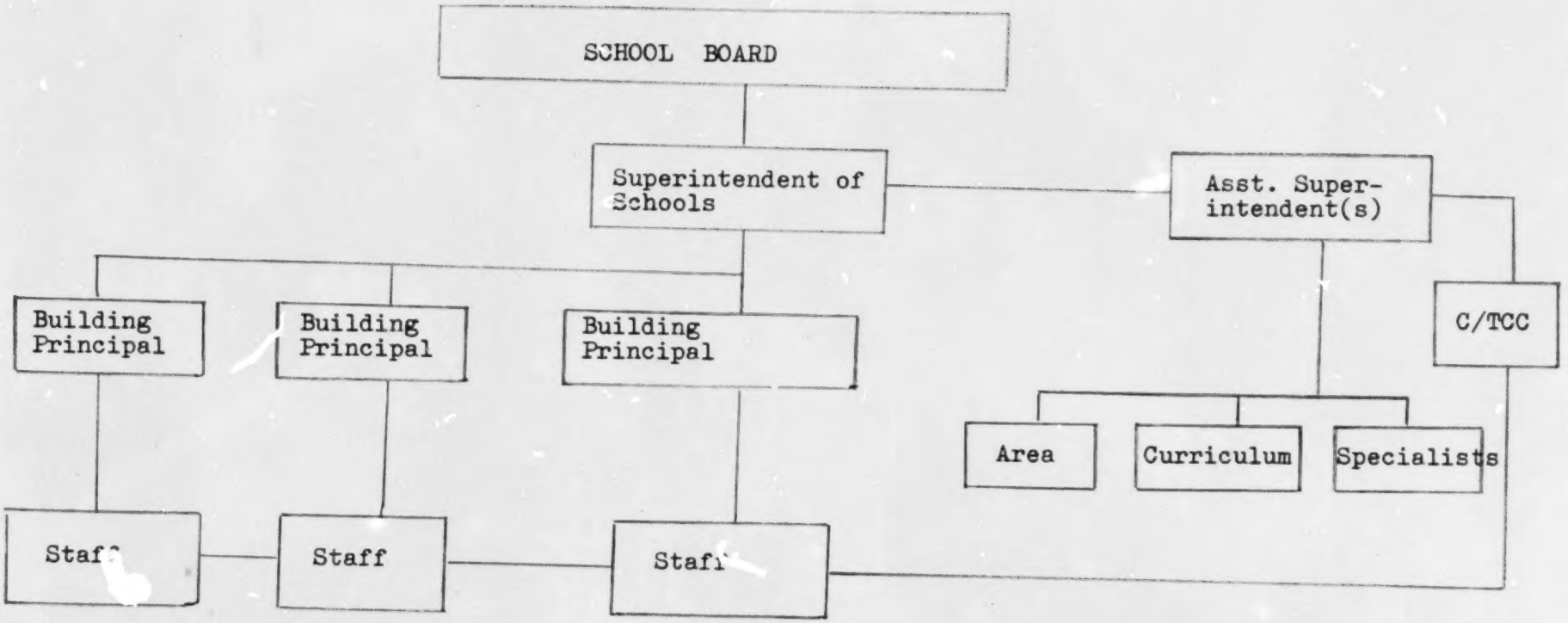

DIAGRAM II: Incorporation of C/TCC Into the School System Organization

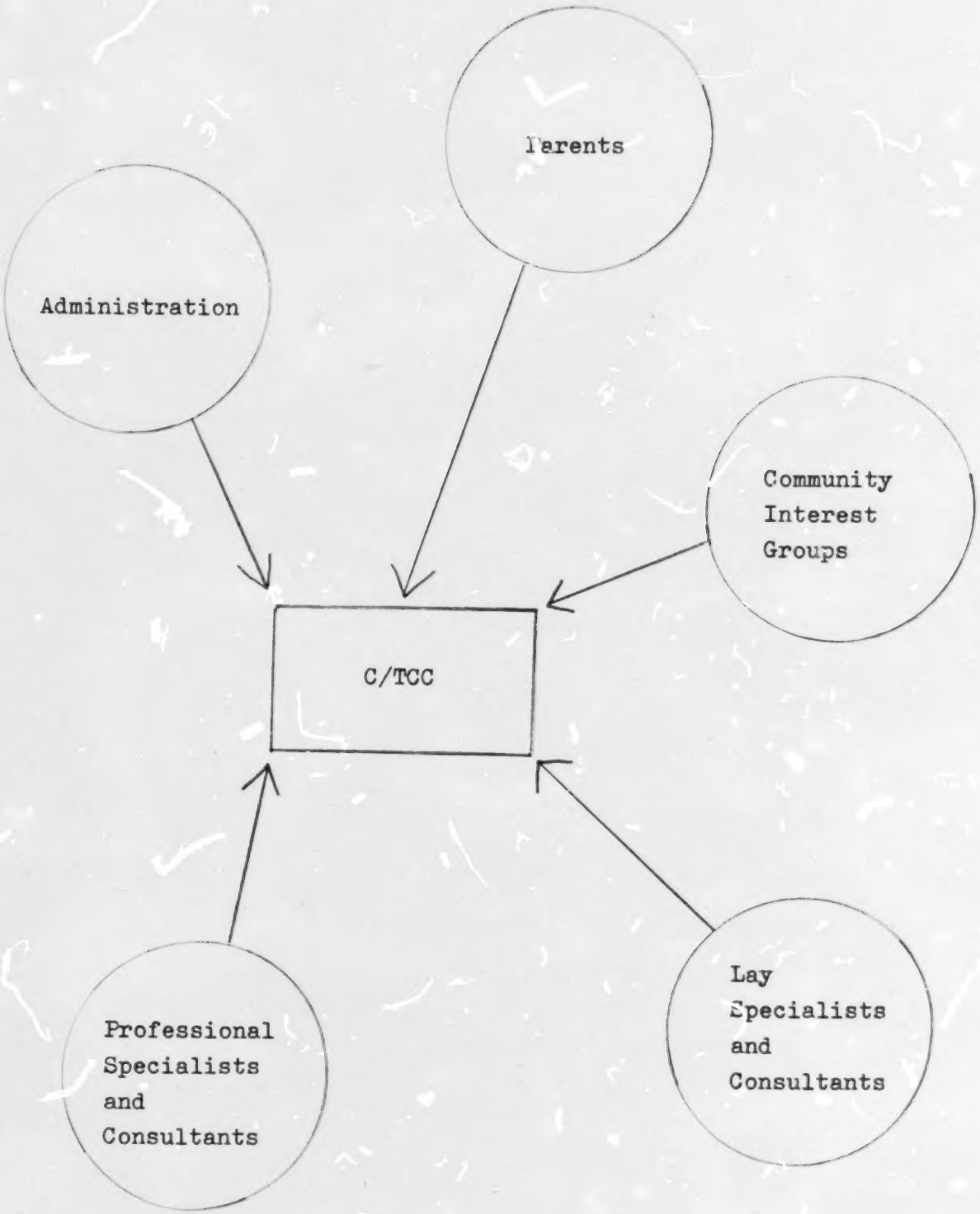

DIAGRAM III: Community Based Input Into the C/TCC Model

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Peters is currently directing an NIE funded Experimental Schools Program (ESP) project in northern New Hampshire. The goal of this ESP project, one of ten such projects nationwide, is to develop a degree of credibility within the education process which makes it an intregral and perceived part of the day-to-day, real life process of individual growth and accomplishment.

The Bachelor of Science in Education and Masters of Education degrees were received from the University of Maine, Orono, and the Doctor of Education degree in the field of curriculum/instruction was granted by the University of Rochester (NY) in 1971. Dr. Peters also undertook doctoral level studies in social studies education at the Florida State University.

As director of an ESP project, Dr. Peters has chaired a community advisory committee since September 1973. The make-up of the committee consists of teachers/students/community members - parents. Among its duties, the committee advises the project administration regarding curriculum development, the utilization of community resources, and teacher in-service staff development.